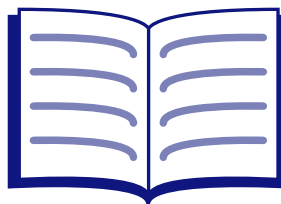




United Way
of Central Iowa



OST Initiative

The Role of the Literacy Coach

What is a literacy coach in the out-of-school time (OST) context?

It's not much different from teachers supporting teachers as literacy coaches, expect that these coaches will be supporting before and after school and summer programs to improve and enhance their literacy enrichment outside of school. In a school context, the major role of a literacy coach in secondary educational institutions is to work with content teachers (specific subjects like math, science, and social studies) across the curriculum to help them implement and utilize strategies designed to improve their students' ability to read, write, and succeed in content courses (Sturtevant). The role of the literacy coach in OST is NOT to simply refashion the school day curricula for the programs, but supplement school learning through the unique mission and goals of the OST program and organization.

In OST, coaches assist program administrations and staff in overcoming challenges to developing and selecting appropriate strategies that positively and intentionally impact student literacy skills. Additionally, coaches can provide an essential link between OST programs and schools by translating school-day jargon and practices into hands-on activities outside of school and communicating back to schools the impact of these efforts.

1. *Literacy coaches are resources for the out-of-school time (OST) administration and staff, always trying to provide support in a nonjudgmental way.* The program or organization administration is responsible for evaluating staff and making decisions that may affect the pay, responsibilities, or employment of the staff —the literacy coach should be represented as someone who serves as a resource and who provides support to help staff improve reading enrichment practices. The literacy coach should take steps to establish a safe, supportive environment for improving practice. Certainly the literacy coach should observe frontline practice and provide feedback for the staff, but the staff should understand that the coach's observations are not used for formal evaluations of their performance.
2. *Most of the literacy coach's time should be spent working with program administrators and staff, but the coach's own professional development (in literacy, instruction, and out-of-school time) should also be a priority.* The literacy coach's professional development should include reading articles, learning new strategies for enrichment and professional development, communicating with other reading and out-of-school time experts, staying abreast of the research, and gathering information to share with the project team. The Iowa Afterschool Alliance can be a good resource to keep up-to-date on the current research in OST:
www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org.

What activities promote literacy skills in OST?

Literacy is the ability to read and write one's own name and further for knowledge and interest, write coherently, and think critically about the written word (Wikipedia). Reading aloud and self-guided reading are examples of activities that develop literacy skills. Other examples of activities that develop literacy skills include writing stories; reading, discussing and dramatizing literature; book discussion groups; intensive tutoring; project research; technology usage; presentation of research or a project, and both small and large group reading activities. Many other activities can incorporate elements that build literacy, including physical fitness, music and the arts, and cooking and nutrition.

3. *The literacy coach should not work with students unless it is to model proposed practices.* The literacy coach is not intended to be an additional staff member. The literacy coach exists to provide training and support to programs to improve and enhance current practice. The coach should visit every program site regularly and the coach should work with administrators and staff to make clear plans about areas of practice to work on and to try out the strategies between visits and meetings.
4. *The literacy coach should consider the five areas of instructional support for teachers, but adapt to the OST environment: theory underlying instruction, demonstration of activities, observation of teachers practicing new lessons, feedback and reflection about instruction, and supporting collaboration among teachers.* This model is useful for OST, as well, and simply provides a “why,” “how,” “do,” “reflect,” and “share” structure for improving practice. The coach should use objective and current data to inform the type of support he or she delivers to the program. A key goal of the literacy coach may be to establish a working relationship between the school(s) and program to improve data sharing that will help make these objective decisions. If data sharing is already in place, the literacy coach may focus on how to empower program administrators and staff to utilize this data to identify the most appropriate activities for their students.
5. *The coach should facilitate frequent program team meetings devoted to examining the most effective strategies, use of data, collaboration with schools, and areas of further need.* These meetings should be designed to encourage questioning, discussion, and dialog. The coach should also focus on building expertise and leadership within the staff.